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## Sugar Culture in the Hemispheric Americas

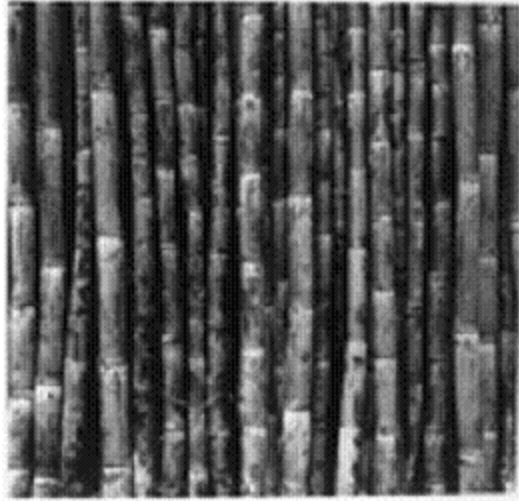
This module examines the development of hemispheric sugar culture, as described within James Grainger's "Sugar-Cane: A Poem." It suggests ways to read poetry within a historical and hemispheric context.

## Sugar Culture in the Hemispheric Americas

A discussion of colonial tobacco cultivation is a standard part of most introductory U.S. History courses. This emphasis on tobacco is justified, in part, because it was the first cash crop produced in North America, it shaped the everyday lives of British North American colonists, and it created new Atlantic trade networks. However, while tobacco was starting to take hold in the Chesapeake during the first half of the seventeenth century, the sugar cultivators of the West Indies were already expanding operations and establishing additional avenues of trade. A study of sugar reveals the development of the global economy in the colonial era. In addition, the unique demands of sugar resulted in the creation of an Atlantic 'sugar culture' characterized by the usage of enslaved laborers, harsh plantation conditions, and boom/bust profit scales. A document within the [missing\_resource: <http://oaap.rice.edu/>][missing\_resource: <http://www.mith2.umd.edu/eada/>]*Sugar-Cane: A Poem* (1764), provides a first-hand account of colonial sugar culture. The poem, divided into four books, represents Grainger's attempt to convey his "Experience" as a St. Christopher sugar planter to other individuals interested in the science of sugar production. It is Grainger's belief that sugar cultivators are capable "of obliging mankind with their improvements." This module suggests avenues through which educators can enhance their discussions of colonial America through the usage of Grainger's poem and an exploration of sugar culture.

### Sugar Cane

A close-up view of sugar cane stalks.



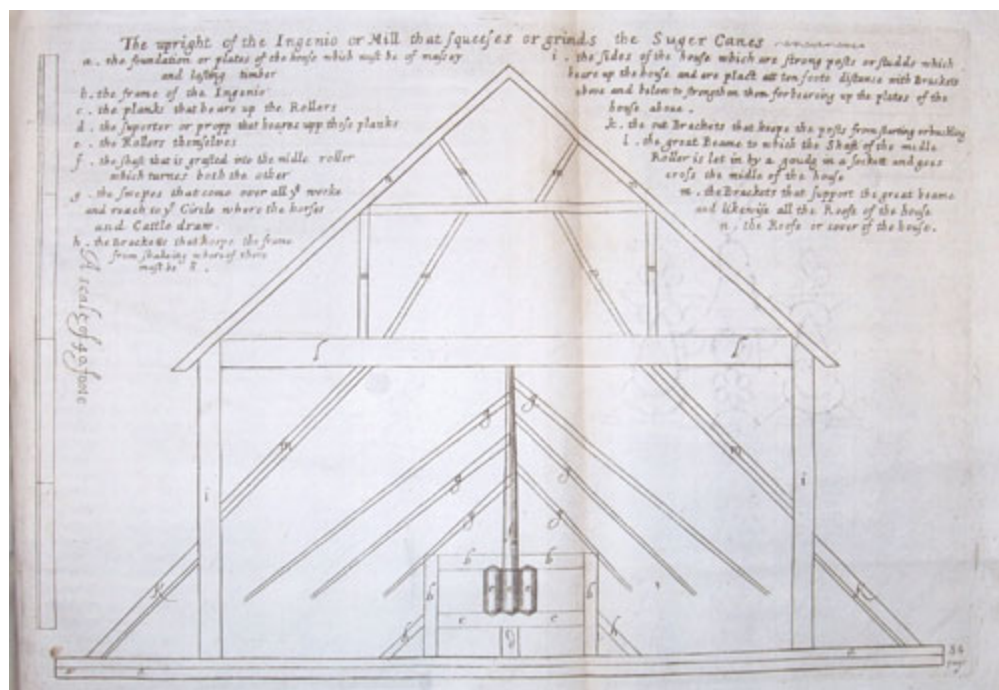
Grainger, who was born in Scotland and travelled to the West Indies during the 1750s, begins the poem by describing the basics of sugar cane planting and processing. For example, he advises planters to “avoid the rocky slope, The clay-cold bottom, and the sandy beach” as planting areas. He also advocates the use of fertilizer before he goes on to discuss how hurricanes and other natural disasters devastate the sugar crop on a yearly basis. In the final book he focuses on relations with slave laborers and advocates a paternalistic relationship. The entire poem is infused with British pride and Grainger closes his work with, “Britain shall ever triumph o’er the main.” The poem’s length and breadth make it a convenient teaching aid for use within introductory college history, AP European History, AP U.S. History, or AP World History courses. An educator could first introduce the poem during a lecture on the importance of sugar during the early colonial period of their course, roughly defined as 1492-1690. During the 1550s the British started to focus on the West Indies and Brazil as sugar colonies. The poem could be further emphasized during the late colonial period and the American Revolutionary Era lectures.

An initial way to incorporate Grainger would be to ask students to place themselves in the position of Grainger’s original audience, potential sugar planters, and ask them to dissect the poem looking for all hints/tips on sugar cultivation. At this point, the instructor could emphasize that *Sugar-Cane: A Poem* was but one of many instructional writings available to planters from the sixteenth century onwards. Then, a class discussion could take place focusing on the detailed process of growing sugar for market purposes in

the colonial era. Students will quickly learn that sugar growing required skilled labor and patience, as a single crop would take over a year from planting to processing. Selections from Richard Sheridan's *Sugar and Slavery* (1973) (see full biographical details below) could provide another description of the process and introduce the broad economic influence of the sugar industry.

### Sugar House

An image of a mill for grinding the harvested sugar cane.



In addition, one lecture could focus specifically on the relationship between sugar and the American Revolution. This could include an explanation of the Sugar Act, but also an emphasis on the trade relationship among Britain, the West Indies, and the North American colonies. Selwyn Carrington's *The Sugar Industry and the Abolition of the Slave Trade, 1775-1810* (2002), provides tables and charts to aid in a discussion of the sugar trade. For instance, Table 2.12 tracks the sugar exports from the British West Indies to Britain for 1772-83 and shows that during just 1772-73 approximately 112,305 casks of sugar were transported. Furthermore, Carrington describes how the byproducts of sugar, such as rum, were also vital to trade. The British West Indies bought North American colonial goods and, "in return,

the mainland colonies took all British West Indian rum,” a byproduct of sugar agriculture (1).

Although an overview of the Atlantic sugar trade is important, the poem also allows for a focus on how the sugar culture manifested itself in a variety of ways on the local level. A comparative exercise could ask students to take on the perspective of sugar planter, or a slave on a sugar plantation, from various locales. Grainger’s poem provides a viewpoint from St. Christopher, while the letters of Pierre Dessales explore the experiences of a planter living in Martinique during the nineteenth century (see *Sugar and Slavery, Family and Race* (1996) for transcriptions of Dessales’s letters and diaries). Another valuable, and vivid, primary source is Jamaican planter Thomas Thistlewood’s 37-volume diary, excerpts of which are printed in Douglas Hall’s *In Miserable Slavery* (1989). All of these accounts give information on sugar culture, planter life, and the slave experience.

Cutting the Sugar-Cane, William Clark, 1823

Slaves working as a group in the cane fields of Antigua.



If a focus on individuals does not work with the outline of the course, an educator could easily craft a lesson drawing upon the ample literature on sugar culture around the globe and throughout history. One essay collection that epitomizes this global perspective is *Sugar, Slavery, and Society* (2004),

which contains eight essays on the Caribbean, India, the Mascarenes, and the United States. These essays make it possible to see how the cultivation of sugar evolved over time and was subject to influences other than the economic pressures of the British. The sugar industry in Louisiana, for example, was influenced by French agricultural advances. As one historian states, “progressive French ideas did find their way into the sugar industry...French chemical and analytical techniques proved to be useful”(26). Educators can stress how West Indian sugar planters in the 1760s, such as Grainger, can be linked to Louisiana sugar cultivators in the 1880s by their ties to world markets and their quest for up-to-date agricultural techniques.

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## Personal Narratives and Transatlantic Contexts during the U.S.-Mexican War

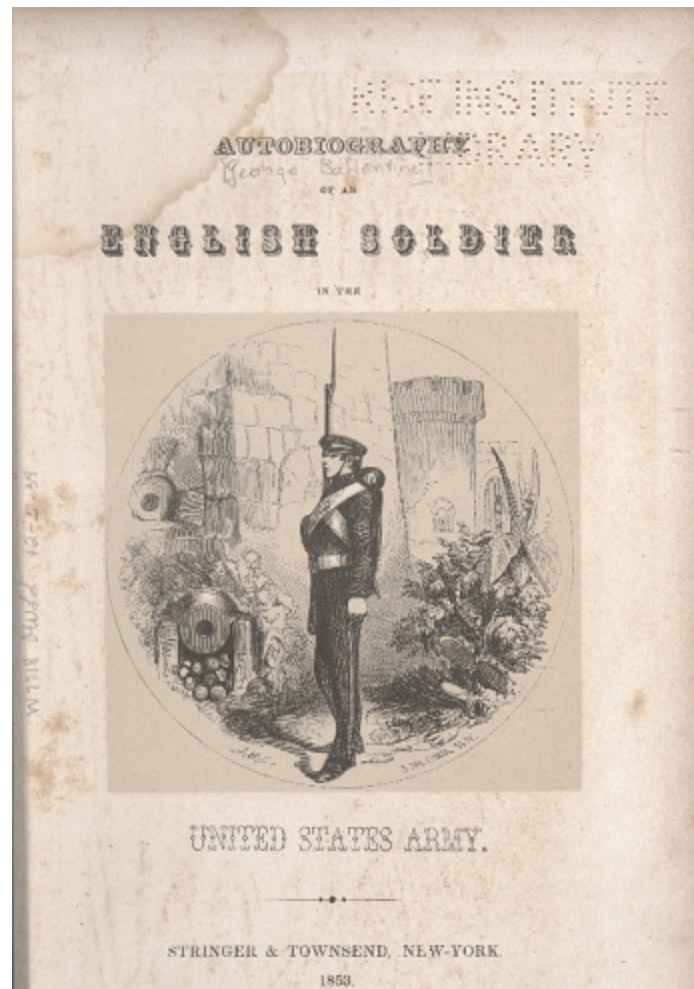
This module explains and provides an example of the literary genre: personal narrative. In addition, it considers this narrative as part of a transatlantic and hemispheric circulation, examining how the text itself evidences cultural exchange through its use of American and British literary allusions.

“I LEFT home for the United States in the summer of 1845, for the same reason that yearly sends so many thousands there, want of employment,” writes Scottish immigrant and English soldier George Ballentine.

Throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the U.S. received into its midst waves of immigrants from across the globe. Immigrant experiences like Ballentine’s were often related and recorded through the form of personal narrative and autobiography. Within these narratives, many immigrants continue to reference conditions in their homeland, creating a comparative structure that relates to transatlantic, trans-pacific, and hemispheric histories of circulation and migration. Ballentine’s immigrant experience was a specifically transatlantic experience which adopted hemispheric implications as a result of his travels throughout the U.S. Mexican borderlands. His [missing\_resource: <http://hdl.handle.net/1911/26929>] *Autobiography of an English soldiers in the United States Army*

Title page from *Autobiography of an English Soldier in the United States Army*



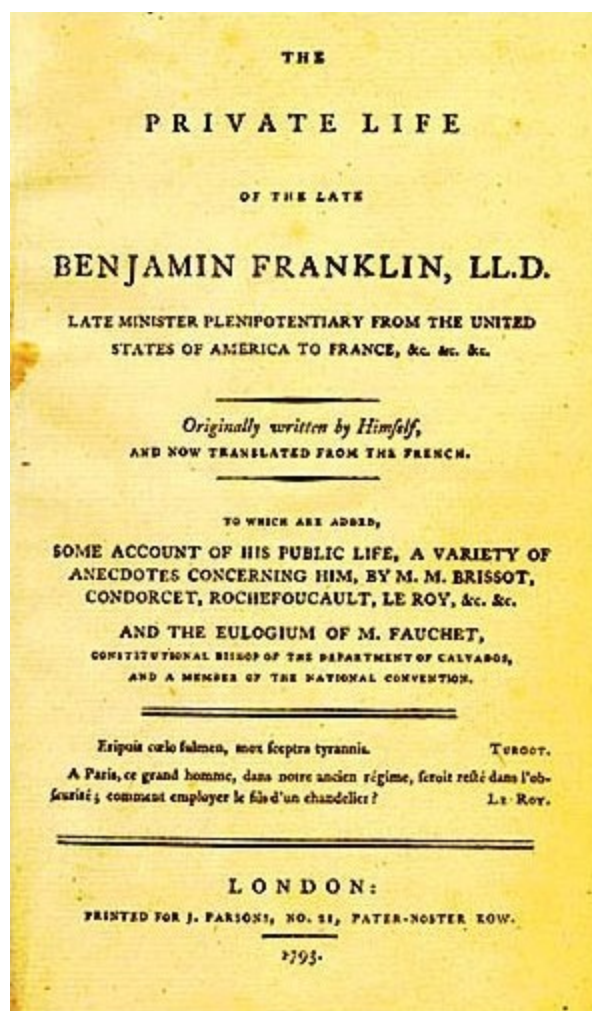


Teachers can begin by introducing Ballentine's narrative as an example of a multilayered personal narrative that represents genres of autobiography and immigration. Personal narrative, as Jonathan Arac argues in *The Emergence of American Literary Narrative, 1820-1860*, is founded upon displacement – pacific voyages, overland journeys to the frontier, slaves' escapes, or immigrant, Atlantic journeys like Ballentine's (76); however, this displacement is not only physical. It also occurs in the relationship between author and reader. Readers are urged to know the narrator, while realizing that there is a difference between the world in which they live and the world in which the narrator lived historically. More specifically, this difference pertains to how the narrative functions as a representation of historical experience and how the reader experiences that narrative as they read it (Arac 76). This distinction provides a key moment for teachers to help students learn about the internal world of a text. What do certain words, phrases, and experiences mean within Ballentine's narrative? What do they

mean in terms of the historical context, and what do they mean to us today? By showing students this process of translation, they can learn the complex layers through which literary narratives convey meaning.

## Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin

Title page from *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*. An online version Franklin's autobiography can be found via the OAAP website or directly through the OAAP partner [missing\_resource: <http://www.mith2.umd.edu/eada/>]



As a part of the early American literary tradition, Ballentine's narrative joins a long line of 19<sup>th</sup> century autobiographical and first-person narratives, such as the *Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin* (1771-1790), Richard Henry Dana's *Two Years Before the Mast* (1840), the *Narrative of*

*the Life of Frederick Douglass* (1845), and Henry David Thoreau's *Walden* (1854). Personal narratives typically have the “circular shape of descent and return,” meaning characters often fall by way of some experience and return to a state of ordinary, civilized life (Arac 77). These narratives function as a way to see another form of life and travel into the past. In addition, Ballentine’s narrative can be located within studies of first-person immigrant texts, such as John Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur’s *Letters from an American Farmer* (1782) (an electronic version linked in the OAAP via the [missing\_resource: <http://www.mith2.umd.edu/eada/>]) *The Promised Land* (1912), and many more. Frequently, personal narratives are appropriated into national narratives; they are used to understand the nation within a certain space and time (77). Teachers might consider pairing Ballentine's autobiography with one of these canonical American literary narratives, helping students to see the similarities and differences within the genre of personal narrative. For instance, teachers might have students read the first five pages of Ballentine's narrative and the first five pages of Benjamin Franklin's narrative to show the different ways in which authors introduce themselves and their writing. What are the first pieces of information that these authors reveal about themselves? What reasons do they provide for writing their narratives? Such questions can help students understand the formula of personal narratives and how various authors deviate from it.

*Autobiography of an English Solider* begins with a classic immigrant arrival story into the harsh streets of New York, where Ballentine quickly realizes that he is “scarcely prepared to find the scramble for the means of living so fierce and incessant, as I found it in New York” (9). Although he attempts to first find employment as a weaver or a whaler, he eventually decides to continue his occupation as a soldier and enlist in the American army. Traveling from Fort Adams, Rhode Island to Pensacola, Florida to Tampico, Mexico, Ballentine eventually participates and observes the siege of Veracruz, which led to the inland march toward Jalapa during the U.S.-Mexican War (1846-1848). Ballentine’s personal narrative situates his experience in the U.S.-Mexican War as part of his immigration experience, and provides a geographic outline of the U.S. during the war as well as a sense of U.S. politics. Furthermore it calls us to understand his first person narrative as one told and interpreted by a witness. By highlighting that his

narrative is both a primary historical source and a literary form using conventions and narrative structures, teachers can help students to understand both the historical and literary nature of the personal narrative. What type of language does Ballentine use? How does he describe the battles? What features of his descriptions point to a first person experience? Siege of Veracruz

Siege of Veracruz originally from *The War Between the United States and Mexico, Illustrated*, 1851



For a more specific example, teachers might draw students' attention to the historical details surrounding Ballentine's retelling of the war. His descriptions provide a first-hand account of the siege of Veracruz, and a defense of General Winfield Scott, who received considerable criticism for his fierce bombardment of Veracruz (152). Teachers might have students research Scott and the criticism surrounding his leadership in this battle. In so doing, teachers can remind students that personal narratives, like all narratives to a certain extent, endorse a certain point of view. What is Ballentine's point of view? Can we discern his political understanding of the war? What does his narrative tell us about U.S. relations with Mexico?

Does he seem like a reliable narrator? Such questions can help students to think critically about what they read, how they read it, and the role of the narrator. For instance, Ballentine compares the poor treatment of the American soldiers to his former experience in the British army. He writes in reference to the soldiers transportation aboard a ship, “In the American, service by the bye, soldiers always lie on the boards when on board ship; in the British service, where the health and comfort of a soldier are objects of study and solicitude, a different custom prevails; a clean blanket and mattress being issued to the soldier on his going on board”(89). Like many immigrant novels, Ballentine’s former homeland stands as a place of comparison. How does his British origin influence his narration of the U.S. and the U.S. Mexican War? Studying the relationship between Ballentine’s homeland (Scotland/Britain) and the U.S. can help students to understand how his perspective of the war was primarily developed outside of the U.S. How is this personal narrative representative of Ballentine’s transatlantic crossing? How is it also representative of borderlands and hemispheric narrative?

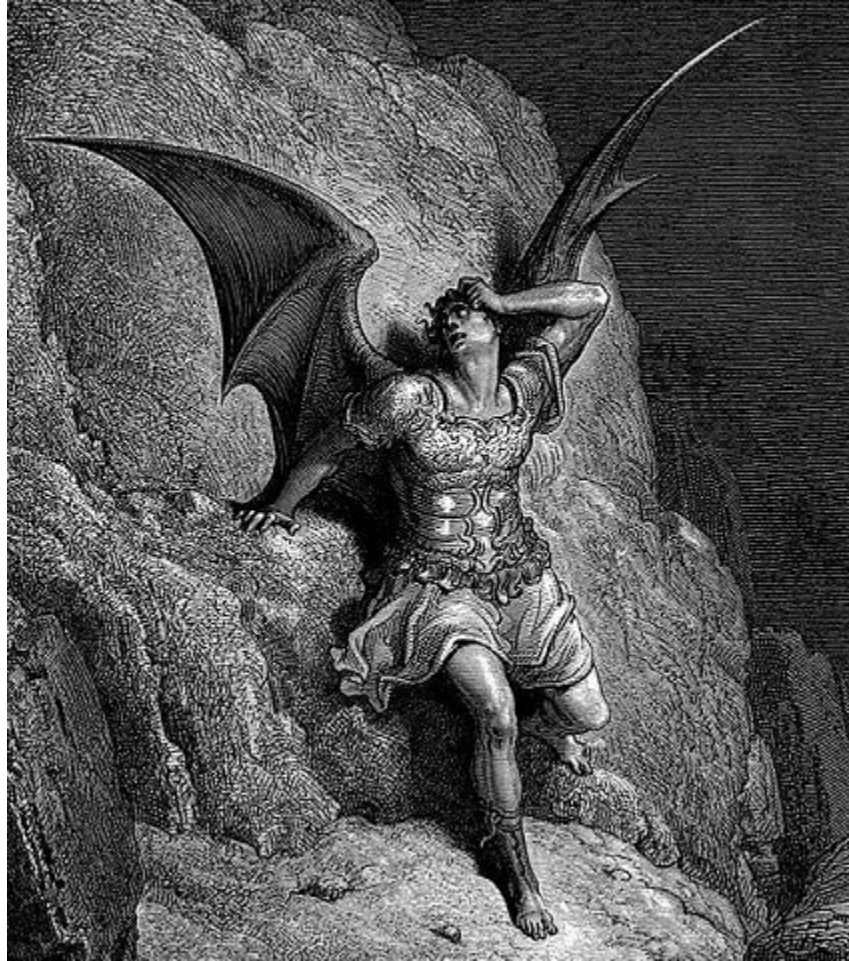
Teachers can also highlight Ballentine’s British-American perspective by calling attention to his use of literary references and conventions. For instance, his description of the siege of Veracruz recreates and relies on the sounds of battle, employing a literary allusion and generic convention to enhance his retelling of the event. Stationed at a small village four miles from Veracruz, he hears the terrifying sound of a canon shell whizzing past him. He writes:

"There is no earthly sound bearing the slightest resemblance to its monstrous dissonance; the angriest shriek of the railway whistle, or the most emphatic demonstration of an asthmatic engine at starting of a train, would seem like a strain of heavenly melody by comparison. Perhaps Milton's description of the harsh, thunder-grating of the hinges of the infernal gates, approaches to a faint realization of the indescribable sound, which bears a more intimate relation to the sublime than the beautiful. (155)"

Portrayal of Satan from *Paradise Lost*

Satan, as drawn by Gustave Doré, in John Milton's *Paradise Lost* .





This description of battle offers a key way for teachers to introduce literary concepts into what appears a straightforward autobiography. The “sublime,” a key concept of British Romanticism and, later, American Romantic literature, was originally used to describe feelings of awe and wonder often inspired by the natural world. Here, Ballentine uses it to describe the sounds of war, throwing in a reference to John Milton’s portrait of hell to dramatize his own terror and the unnerving sounds of battle. What does he compare his experiences to? How does his reference to Milton’s *Paradise Lost* (1667) formulate meaning within the text? What does it mean to locate a 17<sup>th</sup> century British poet within a story of the 19<sup>th</sup> century U.S.–Mexican War? This reference provides a key opportunity to define the literary term “allusion.” An allusion is: “a reference in a literary work to a person, place, or thing in history or another work of literature” (*All American: Glossary of Literary Terms*).

These types of questions can help students to do the investigative work of literary analysis by urging them to find the references and conventions that configure meaning. In fact, Ballentine makes multiple literary references throughout his autobiography. For instance, he makes allusions to Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" (1798), Frederick Marryat's lesser-known novel *Snarleyyow* (1837), and Augustus Jacob Crandolph's gothic novel *The Mysterious Hand; or, Subterranean Horrors!* (1811). Interestingly, these cultural references situate the literature of the British Romantics within the context of the Mexican-American War, allowing these texts to produce new meaning. Furthermore, many of these allusions refer to stories of the sea, and Ballentine's brief experience of travel along the Atlantic and Gulf coastlines. For an exercise, teachers might have their students read a section of "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" and consider how Ballentine's allusion works within the text. What can we learn from this type of reference? Is it helpful in understanding Ballentine's experience? What new meaning does it add to Coleridge's well-known poem? Although many of Ballentine's references are allusions to British literature, they would not have escaped many of his contemporary American readers. Moreover, he also references American texts, such as Herman Melville's 1851 American epic, *Moby Dick*. His use of both British and American literary references reveals the blending of literary cultures and histories and locates them within a story of shifting national borders.

After presenting a lesson on personal narratives, teachers might present students with the following questions:

1. What is a personal narrative? How does it function? Provide an example.
2. What influences Ballentine's perspective in his autobiography?
3. What can we learn about the U.S. and the U.S.-Mexican War from Ballentine's narrative?
4. What is a literary allusion? Do you think it is important or helpful to research historical references and/or literary allusions? Why or why not? (This is an opinion question).
5. Write your own one page personal narrative. Choose an event from your life and retell the story from your perspective.

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## Close-reading Tropical Landscapes of the Americas

This module develops skills of close-reading setting and historical background. It offers ways to introduce a discussion of environment, colonialism, race, and gender into practices of textual and historical analysis.

Setting is important for understanding a text's themes, plot, characters, and historical significance. Elements, such as the “**time, place, physical details, and circumstances in which a situation occurs**” (*Glossary*), orient the reader within the story, and provide the background for a narrative's structure. This module will focus on how to closely read settings and landscapes of historical and literary texts. Using the [missing\_resource: <http://oaap.rice.edu/index.php>]*Las Mujeres Españoles Portuguesas y Americanas* or, in its English version, [missing\_resource: <http://hdl.handle.net/1911/20705>]*Las Mujeres* is a non-fiction text, the passages selected for this module can help introduce issues of race and gender into a discussion of setting and landscape, showing how a text's themes are often reflected through an author's description of space. Finally, this module can provide ways to call students' attention to how setting informs our understanding of geography and culture.

### *Las Mujeres*

Title page of 1876 *Las Mujeres Españoles Portuguesas y Americanas*  
or *Spanish, Portuguese, and American Women*



the red, eyelike gleam of hostile campfires set in the lower brows of distant hills. (1)"

After reading such a passage, teachers can ask their students some of the following questions: What do we know so far about this story? What words stuck out to you? What did you learn about the historical and physical background of this story? When and where does this story take place? What type of language does the author use to describe the place and time? (Ask students to consider, for instance, adjectives, verb tenses, etc.). Students should be able to draw some conclusions from this passage, such as: this novel takes place during a time of war and the current setting is outside at dawn break. However, teachers can push students to go further than this: what is the atmosphere of this landscape? ("tremble with eagerness," "hostile campfires," and "sorrowful blackness") What sounds, smells, or other sensory details does the novel provide? ("cold" and "noise of rumors,") What details or words reveal the physical landscape? In other words, if you had to draw a picture from what you learn in this passage what would it look like? ("retiring fogs," "changed from brown to green," "roads," "long troughs of liquid mud," "lower brows of distant hills"). What don't we know so far? What type of a description is this? This simple exercise can cue students into the basic skill of close-reading a text: listening, searching, and questioning the details provided by the author.

## Part 2: Close-Read Setting and the Language of Difference

### "Woman of Havana"

Image of a woman from Havana found in *Spanish, Portuguese, and American Women*



Next, teachers can direct their students to a discussion of setting and theme, considering how and why some non-fiction and fiction writers of the 19<sup>th</sup> century construct concepts of ethnic and cultural difference through a text's environment and setting. Begin by reading the following selection from *Spanish, Portuguese, and American Women*, written by Teodoro Guerrero in his chapter "The Woman from the Island of Cuba". Provide students with a copy of this passage, as well as the following passages mentioned in this

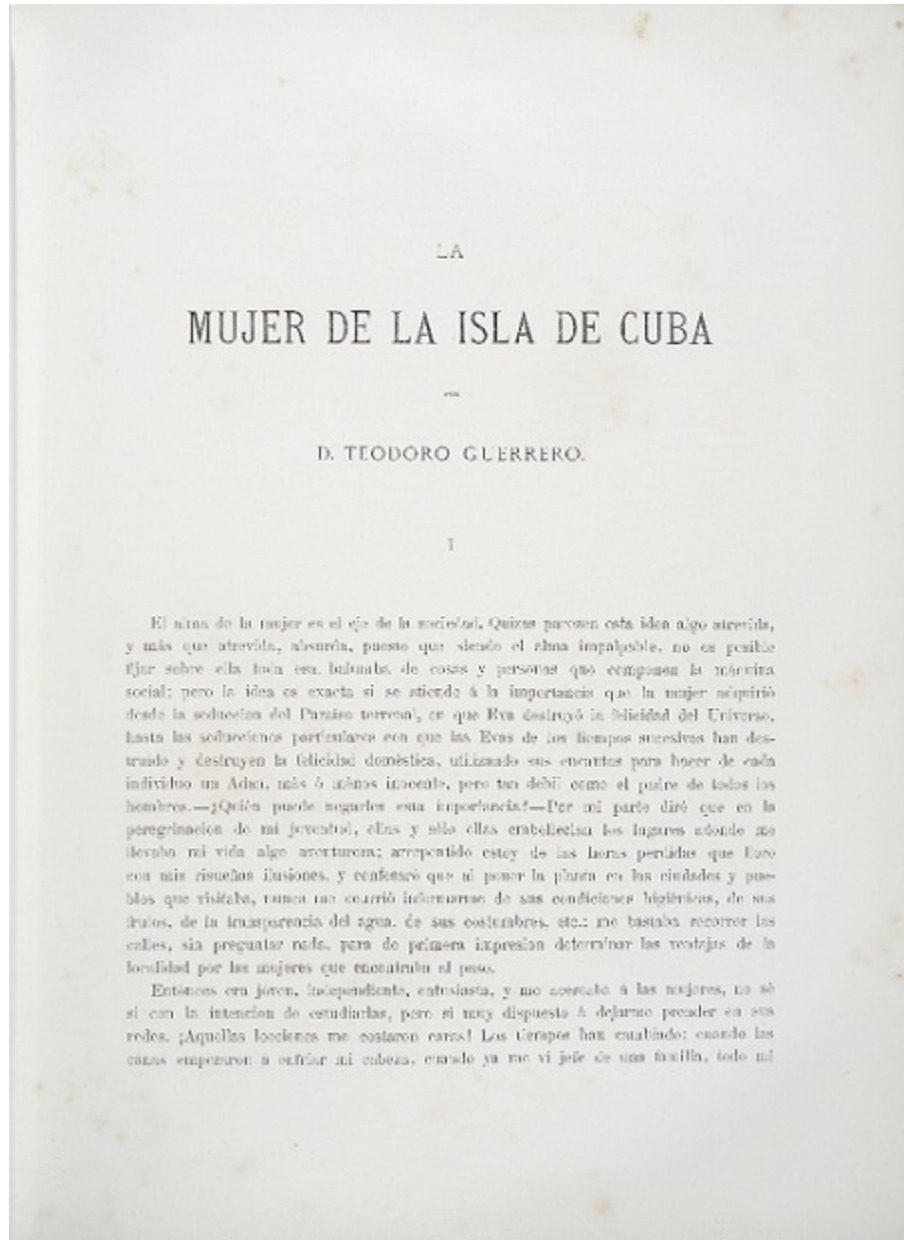
module. Read this aloud twice. The first time, read the passage at a regular pace or have a student do so. The second time, read the passage slowly and have students underline and circle important words in the passage - for instance, circle all verbs and underline all adjectives.

"The tropical sun, which beats down heavily upon the children of Cuba, heats the imagination, as seen through vivid flashes, genius rays of light. In the place where everything is poetry, everything is love, where the sky is clothed in the most beautiful colors as it bids farewell to the sun in the west, where palm trees conspicuously and gracefully sway in the air amongst the most varied and exuberant vegetation, where trees never lose their leaves, where brightly colored birds sing melodious trills, where the moon's light contests the brightness of the morning sun, where woman imprints voluptuous languor on her steps, the poet's muse should strum the mind to pluck harmonious sonnets from the mysterious lyre, the lyre with invisible strings, known as inspiration. In that place, everything sings— youths sing to relieve the fire that burns within their souls; in the villages, the *guajiro* sings to the sounds of his *tiple*<sup>5</sup> to delight his beloved; in the fields, the slave sings to silence his chains; the bird sings in the bower; love sings in the heart. (10)"

After reading this paragraph aloud, teachers can perform a close-reading on this paragraph, asking students questions similar to those posed after the Stephen Crane passage. Teachers might guide students to the following conclusions: 1) **What type of language does this passage represent? How would you characterize the words you underlined or circled? What does this language say about Cuba?** The passage's language romanticizes both Cuba and its inhabitants, casting this space as a foreign, tropical, and escapist landscape. 2) **Discuss one major feature of this description and then discuss how and if it influences our understanding of Cuba's peoples.** For instance, the brightness and color of this description hauntingly lulls the songs of the slave into harmony with the songs of the heart, integrating the dark history of slavery with those of a tropical island getaway. 3) **What people are mentioned? Choose either the woman, the poet, the guajiro, or the slave. What adjectives are used to describe this figure and how is this reflected in the environment of Cuba?** Cuba becomes a sexualized and exotic landscape through the "voluptuous



languor” of Cuban women. The romantic language of the tropical setting blends with this portrayal of Cuban women, and paints them as sensual, animated versions of the landscape. 4) After close-reading Cuba’s landscape, teachers might ask students to finally summarize Cuba in one sentence. **By reading this passage, how do you understand Cuba?**  
**"The Woman from the Island of Cuba"**



Next, teachers can introduce this passage into a long-standing discussion of geographic mapping and environmental description. Many texts represent the nations, natives, and regions of Central and South America through

strategies of “tropicalization.” To “**tropicalize**” means to “imbue a particular space, geography, group, or nation with a set of traits, images, and values” (8). Authors that tropicalize from the position of colonizer or imperialist, do so from a place of privilege, and, thus, assert power over that space by locating it within an encompassing set of characteristics. This strategy often connects the environmental factors of regions and places to ethnic characterizations of a place’s inhabitants. Often times, 19<sup>th</sup> century travelers, especially Anglo-American travelers, described the residents of tropical locales as lazy and volatile due to the heat, tropical setting, and romance of the Southern Hemisphere. This type of characterization constructs ethnic stereotypes by which ethnicity reflects climate and location. Interestingly, the different authors of *Spanish, Portuguese, and American Women* both encourage and resist tropes of tropicalization. For instance, Guerrero initially contradicts the stereotypes of the tropics, refuting claims that the “the excessive heat of the tropics” “weakens the spirit” and causes “indolence” in natives (7). However, he also describes Cuba as space of exotic sexuality, where women come to blend with the beauty of the landscape. For instance:

"If, by good fortune, all my readers had set foot upon those far beaches, I would not have to strain myself to praise Cuban women [...] What did you expect? That women— who sway like poetic palm trees, who bend their waists like sugar canes caressed by a soft breeze, who bear the sun’s flames within their hearts, the moon’s the brilliant paleness in their faces, and the luster of the stars in their eyes— can be seen without opening the soul to great impressions? (6-7)"

Despite his refutation of stereotypes, Guerrero presents Cuban women as sensual figures that blend into the tropical landscape. Teachers might discuss this passage by asking students: **What is this passage about? Cuban Women or Cuba?** For an in-class exercise, teachers might provide their students with a handout of this paragraph (as well as the previous one) or place this passage on a projector so that students both hear and see the words. Secondly, teachers might ask students: **which words apply to Cuban women and which words apply to Cuba’s landscape?** Asking questions that rely on reader's response can allow for teachers to guide students to the intersection of race, gender, and place. For instance, **how do**

**we understand Cuba as this author describes it? How do we understand the women of Cuba when they are placed in the context of “soft breeze[s]” and “the sun’s flames”? How is the author “praising” Cuban women?** Calling students to consider these characterizations and how they reflect the basic details of a text’s setting, can show the different ways racial and gender dynamics influence our sense of space, landscape, and geography. To a certain extent, this passage performs the opposite function of pathetic fallacy or personification, “a figure of speech where animals, ideas or inorganic objects are given human characteristics” (*Glossary*). The bodies of Cuba’s women blend with the swaying palm trees, their waists become like sugar, and the sun is reflected in the passion of their hearts. Rather than attribute the landscape with human qualities, Guerrero attributes Cuban women with the qualities of Cuba’s tropical landscape.

Woman of Cuba

Another image of a Cuban woman.





### Part 3: Tropical Environment and Landscapes of Race

Teachers can then discuss how descriptions of environment and landscape influence perceptions of race. For instance, hot tropical environments like Guerrero's Cuba were often described as places of racial difference and race-mixing in 19th century texts. As spaces of colonization, North and South America were often considered places where colonizers, colonized,

immigrants, and imported/enslaved laborers sexually and cultural intermixed. British and Spanish colonizers responded differently to the intermingling of racial groups. Although tensions and hierarchies existed in Spanish-America, miscegenation became an important way to acculturate and assimilate natives into the new colonial order. (In British-America, miscegenation certainly occurred; but, British colonists adhered to concepts of race purity more stringently than their Spanish-American neighbors [Rosenthal 6]).

Woman of Puerto Rico

Image of a woman from Puerto Rico.



*Spanish, Portuguese, and American Women* highlights Spain's colonization of the Western Hemisphere and its history of race-mixing. For instance, Guerrero describes both Cuban and Puerto Rican women in terms of Creoles and natives, the first of which he defines as "a child born in America of European parents" (7). He writes, "These women are *Cuban*—Creoles in the true sense of the word" (7), and "In the villages of Ponce, Mayaguez, Aguadilla, and Arecibo, one will find the Puerto Rican woman—

a pure-blooded Creole” (25). Guerrero explains the Creole through the history of Spanish colonization, and berates Spain’s attempt to define these women as other than Spanish. For Guerrero, the divisions created by colonialism are an irrelevant set of racial distinctions. In regard to the natives of Puerto Rico, he emphasizes assimilation or “absorption,” as he calls it. Unable to find the "copper complexion" of the "beautiful Indian" among the women of Puerto Rico, he explains their disappearance through assimilation and, in so doing, calls us to question where and if natives fit into the racial landscape of Central and South America that he depicts. As he writes, "Native Indian women have disappeared *through absorption*. The mixture of races is the cause of this change; just as a single grain of indigo loses its color as it is dissolved in water, the Indian woman, in the confusion with the white colonists, and later, the union of their natural descendants with African women, erased the racial print, taking with it savage customs, which would have been pushed aside naturally by the growth of civilization. As a result, much of Europe can be seen here today [...] (6). His comments call for us to understand the colonial history of miscegenation and race-mixture, and how these concepts are reflected in the setting of fictional novels and the landscapes of non-fictional documents.

#### Part 4: Visualizing the Tropical

##### Woman of Paraguay





Woman of the Philippines



As a final part of this lesson, teachers can call students attention to *Spanish, Portuguese, and American Women's* rich source of images. Because this module has focused on Guerrero's description of the Cuban landscape and its women, begin with images of Cuban women, such as those featured throughout this module. **How does this image reflect Guerrero's description of Cuba and its women? What features of the setting and landscape are provided in the picture? What do these features tell us**

**about Cuba and Cuban women? What characteristics of race and culture are expressed here? What type of clothing and colors are these women wearing? Not all of these pictures are set within Cuba's physical landscape, so what differences do you see in the different Cuban women and Cuban settings as they are depicted in these images?** Next, teachers can move on to some of the other images in *Spanish, Portuguese, and American Women*. Compare and contrast how women of different nations are portrayed. For instance, see the two images above.

Calling on students to explore setting alongside themes of race and gender can help develop skills of literary and historical analysis, and urge students to look for these themes outside the basic plot and character formations. Considering how tropical landscapes are gendered and racialized can reveal how different authors map the hemisphere through tools of setting, climate, and environment.

### **Study Questions:**

1. What details of setting should you look for when reading a historical text or book?
2. What features of Cuba's landscape does Guerrero highlight?
3. Pick out 5 key phrases (2-3 words) that Guerrero uses to describe Cuba's landscape, then provide a one sentence analysis of the type of language he uses.
4. How do race and gender emerge as a reflection of the Cuba's landscape? How would you characterize this relationship?
5. Group Activity: Take one chapter/location from *Spanish, Portuguese, and American Women* (Cuba, Puerto Rico, the Philippines, Ecuador, etc.), and analyze the first five pages. Use the following questions to get started: What language does the author use to describe this place and its inhabitants? Does his language reflect his assessment of the people themselves? What conclusions does this author draw? In your opinion, what is important to him?

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